



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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COLORADO RIVER LAND USE AND TRESPASS PROGRAM ANNOUNCED

The Department of the Interior's plan for settling the troublesome problem of land use along the Colorado River from Davis Dam to the Mexican border was announced today by Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall.

Land along the river was withdrawn many years ago for reclamation purposes, but some of these lands have been occupied by unauthorized "squatters" who have used various lands for agricultural, recreational, business, and residential purposes.

"In formulating this plan," said the Secretary, "the Department has kept three considerations in sharp focus:

- "1. The lands constitute property of the United States and Federal ownership must be recognized;

- "2. The locations of the lands along the banks of the only great river in the great Southwest require their integration in any master land use plan; and

- "3. The public interest requires that the lands be administered for the benefit of all the people of the Nation."

Udall's announcement was in two parts: First, there will be established in Yuma, Arizona, effective May 1, a land use office to supervise implementation of the plan, and, second, details of how the land will be put to use. The latter includes instructions on a transition plan under which the squatters who cooperate can continue to use the lands for a period of at least two years while the land use plan is put into effect.

"Some of the Government-owned land along the Colorado," Udall said, "offers an opportunity to salvage a major national recreational and scenic asset." The land will be classified in four categories:

1. Areas suitable for national recreational development.
2. Areas suitable for national game refuges.
3. Areas suitable for State parks and recreational uses.
4. Areas which should remain under State game and fish agencies as refuges. (Most of the river is bounded by Arizona or California, but to the north, Nevada controls a sizeable stretch.)

The Secretary stated that Federal ownership must be acknowledged by the squatters if they are to participate in the transition program.

Udall's plan for present users of the Federal lands--some 20,000 acres of which are devoted to agriculture--includes the following requirements:

1. The squatters will be expected to sign a disclaimer statement acknowledging Federal ownership.
2. Those who do so will be given permits to use the lands they now occupy for approximately two years, subject to acreage limitation in case of agricultural use, if they acknowledge Federal ownership and if they agree to pay reasonable rent for past and future use. They will acquire no interest in the land and no preferential treatment will be accorded them in the administration of the program.

"Our program," Udall said, "will restore Federal control and management and at the same time offer the squatters a reasonable course of action to close out their investments. If present unauthorized users refuse to cooperate, we will have no alternative but to commence summary court proceedings to evict and recover full damages for all past use."

Permits for continued occupancy will be offered to persons who were on the land before the date of this announcement (April 20, 1961). Any persons occupying Federal lands along the river subsequently will be evicted and prosecuted for trespass, Udall declared.

The Yuma office will be opened under general supervision of Graham Hollister of Genoa, Nevada, Special Assistant to the Secretary. It will administer the permit system, conduct further land use studies, and advise the Secretary in determining the best use, from the public's standpoint, of each parcel of land in the affected area.

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